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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Robin Brannon
Virginia Department of Social Services
(804) 726-7110

VDSS ANNOUNCES NEW SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR VIRGINIA

Richmond – How much does it cost to live in Virginia?

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) announced today the release of a tool that helps provide an answer. The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Virginia calculates a family-sustaining wage that does not require choosing between basic necessities such as child care, nutritional food, adequate housing, or health care. However, the Standard only covers immediate, day-to-day necessities, excluding longer-term needs such as retirement savings or college tuition, purchases of major items such as a car, emergency expenses, or extras such as gifts or after school activities.

“Think of it this way,” said VDSS Commissioner Anthony Conyers Jr. “You’re a faith-based organization trying to help a family that includes an adult, a teenager and an infant. Every penny counts. What’s their budget for the basics? How will that differ if the family relocates from Hopewell to Manassas?”

“Without the Standard, social service workers and community groups would have to guess at what a family needs to survive,” said Tom Steinhauser, Director of Benefit Programs for VDSS. The Standard calculates the self-sufficiency requirements for 70 different family types in various locations throughout the state.

It differs from one of the earliest benchmarks for assessing income, the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Developed more than four decades ago, the FPL was based on a single item – food. The Self-Sufficiency Standard differs from the FPL in five important ways:

1. The Standard independently calculates the cost of basic needs - not just food.
2. The Standard assumes that all adults – married or single – work full-time and includes all major costs (child care, taxes, etc.) associated with employment.

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3. The Standard varies costs by family size (as does the FPL), but it also varies costs by family composition and the ages of children.
4. Whenever possible and appropriate, the Standard varies costs geographically (by state, region, county, and in some cases, by city or locality.)
5. The Standard includes federal, state, and local taxes (e.g., income, payroll, and sales taxes) and tax credits. It also takes into account the wide variety of family structures that exist in today's society.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is the result of a study performed by the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington in Seattle. The previous Standard for the Commonwealth of Virginia was delineated in 2002.

To view information on the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Virginia, visit the VDSS Web site at: http://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/vdss_stats.html.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) <http://www.dss.virginia.gov> Home Office is located in Richmond and administers social services programs, consistent with Federal and State law and policy of the State Board of Social Services through 120 local departments of social services (LDSS) throughout the state. The VDSS mission is "People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities."

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